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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; US-LATIN AMERICAN TIES; URIBE TO THE US;
UNITAS EXERCISE; WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY; 05/03/07; BUENOS AIRES

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Key international stories today include the US-Latin American relationship, according to Karen Tramontano, former Clinton advisor; Colombian President Uribe's trip to Washington; the UNITAS military exercise; and today's celebration of World Press Freedom Day.

2. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "'The US-Latin American relationship could be rebuilt'"

Jorge Sosa, international columnist of business-financial "El Cronista," penned (05/03) "She (Karen Tramontano) thoroughly knows the Democrats' moves on Capitol Hill. She is a former advisor to ex president Bill Clinton during his last period in the White House... and now works for DutkoWorldwide, an influential lobbying agency in Washington, where she provides counsel to Democratic legislators. During an interview with 'El Cronista' in Buenos Aires, Karen Tramontano said that if Democrats win presidential elections next year, they will give more strategic importance to the region.

"Asked about Washington's view of Latin America and why Bush made a trip to the region in March, Tramontano answered 'One of the greatest reasons for disappointment for many people in Washington have is that the US-Latin American relationship is not stronger. Many people are adopting extreme positions both regarding President Bush and President Chavez and finally it is people who end up suffering in both nations. Both the US and South America can be strong if they work together and do not slide towards isolation. The Democratic majority on Capitol Hill (even Republican leaders), intellectuals and businessmen who traveled to Latin America see the connection and the possibility of building greater integration in the hemisphere. There is a great opportunity for the public and private sectors in Argentina and the US to rebuild a relationship that existed in the past.'"

- "Uribe seeks Washington's cooperation"

Maria Laura Carpineta, columnist of left-of-center "Pagina 12," writes (05/03) "Alvaro Uribe will knock on every single door during his three-day tour, which he started in Washington yesterday. The Colombian president is determined to convince the White House, Capitol Hill, NGOs and trade unions about the strategic need to support his country, both on the military and commercial level. His two main goals are: unlocking the approval of funds for the struggle against drug trafficking, the so-called Plan Colombia, and obtaining the Democratic legislators' support for an FTA, which the two nations signed last November. However, the Colombian president will have to demonstrate to the US opposition that neither he nor his government helped the paramilitary, an organization Washington considers terrorist. Yesterday, he said 'Perhaps I will have to apologize for some mistakes but never for crimes.'

"Last month, the Chairman of the US Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Patrick Leahy, ordered to freeze the 55 million dollar package for Colombia as a sign of mistrust over the Uribe administration's human rights policy. Plan Colombia was originally Bill Clinton's idea and it has always been supported by the Democratic Party. However, this support could now be uncertain due to the close ties between President George W. Bush and Uribe and particularly due to the increasing claims on possible ties between Uribe and the paramilitary leaders when Uribe was governor of Antioquia. Add to this, the Democrat's reticence on bilateral trade deals. This is why Capitol Hill has locked the approval of three FTAs with Latin American countries - Colombia, Peru and Panama."

- "The 'UNITAS Operation' will start today"

Natasha Niebieskikwiat, columnist of leading "Clarín," writes (05/03) "For now, the US has set aside its request for Argentina to grant immunity to US troops in its territory. In this way, the (Argentine) Senate passed a request from the Executive Branch for foreign troops to participate in the Atlantic phase of the 48th UNITAS Military exercise in Puerto Belgrano and Ushuaia."

"According to high-ranking sources, out of the total number of 1,500 troops, 900 come from the US, which has not occurred since the last UNITAS exercise held in 2003."

"... According to the Defense Ministry and Congress, this time Washington did not request troop immunities, which had created serious tension with Argentina because the country refuses to grant immunities to any kind of foreign troops. Actually, the legislation passed yesterday by the Senate clearly specifies this."

- "Press freedom"

Daily-of-record "La Nación" editorializes (05/03) "... Today, May 3, we celebrate World Press Freedom Day, which was established in 1993 by the UN General Assembly. For this reason, the prestigious Freedom House NGO issued its usual report on press freedom in several parts of the world."

"... Regarding Latin America, the most important injury to press freedom is seen in Venezuela, whose totalitarian political system leaves less and less maneuvering room for the independent media. However, in other countries (such as Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay or the Dominican Republic) there are clear pressures against free media although freedom of expression seemingly prevails."

"Today, it would be important for Argentine authorities to reflect on their behavior with the media and on the treatment of public information. The president of Argentina has not granted any press conference ever since he took over in 2003 and public information is frequently treated as though it was private property of restricted access. The government should change these kinds of attitudes for the sake of democracy..."

"... Every authoritarian demand on the media hides an attack against democracy and the purpose of controlling and even annulling the rights of citizens. Without free media, there is no democracy, and, finally, there are no citizens either."

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